



4:22PM EST  
PARTLY SUNNY  
TMP:63° W.C:56°  
4day Forecast Doppler SkyView 16



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Today 5:00pm

Dr. Phil is one of TV's top talk show hosts. But how is he with motivating people to lose weight?

Today at 5, **Dr. Phil's Ultimate Weight Loss Solution** is the focus of our continuing **16 Shape-Up Challenge**. We found some Elkhart County and CITY workers willing to try it. Will it work for them, and could it work for YOU? Tune in and see!

Today on **NewsCenter 16's First News at 5pm**, Coverage You Can Count On.



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## Lake levels vary over the years



For St. Joseph/Benton Harbor, this is a commercial port, huge freighters come in off Lake Michigan and unload their cargo



Posted: 11/14/2003 06:06 pm

As waves crash over the pier at Silver Beach, you wouldn't think that lake levels are so low. To those that live and work near Lake Michigan, though, it's obvious.

John Kinney of Consumer Asphalt says, "I've never, ever seen them this low. I've been coming down here since I was a young boy, walking with my grandfather and my dad. It's just unbelievable. It seems like every month, I see something else sticking out of the water, I never knew was there."

For people like John, Lake Michigan is their lifblood. The Great Lakes are a tremendous resource. It's the largest collection of fresh water in the world and, they're obviously not going to dry up, but they have lost 30 trillion gallons of water recently.

For St. Joseph/Benton Harbor, this is a commercial port, huge freighters come in off Lake Michigan and unload their cargo. A wall is being built slightly higher than the water has even been, and you can see it is several feet below that now.

Water levels on Lake Michigan have varied by more than 6 feet in the past hundred years. The highest was in October of 1986 and the lowest was in March of 1994. However, since 1997, the lake has fallen by 4.1 feet, the fastest drop ever.

According to NewsCenter 16's Chief Meteorologist Mike Hoffman, this coming winter, the water levels here on Lake Michigan may very well approach record low levels. One of the side benefits is we end up with a lot more beach.

"Wider beaches protect lakefront homeowners, protect their property and their investments, because it provides an area for the waves to crash and break," said Brian Breidert, an Indiana DNR biologist.

But we don't want the lake to get too far out of whack, and the weather plays a huge role in whatever happens. "The biggest factor is meteorological conditions, such as precipitation, snow cover, evaporation," said Tim Calappi of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

From 1997 through 2002, precipitation in the Lake Michigan basin has averaged very close to normal. So, the main factor in this latest drop of water

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levels must be our mild winters. About 40% of the water in the Great Lakes is snowmelt and less snow means lower lake levels the following summer. Mild winters also hurt by keeping the water warmer, which is more easily evaporated.

"When you have a large difference between the surface water temp and the air, evaporation is really at its' peak then," said Calappi.

And 31% of the water loss in Lake Michigan is due to simple evaporation. During a cold winter, an ice cover may slow up the shipping temporarily, but it also slows up the evaporation.

Calappi says, "Certainly, if we get a more normal winter with more ice cover and more snow, precipitation, that's going to push us away from that record level," said Breidert.

So what does the future look like? The forecast is for Lake Michigan to bottom out in March very close to, and perhaps at, record levels. Then the lake should recover by July to levels slightly higher than this past summer. But, this forecast depends on three main things. We need a lot of snow, ice and rain. They are the key ingredients to the health of the Great Lakes, and all three are needed to help Lake Michigan thrive for generations to come.

There's not a lot man has done or can do. to significantly change the Great Lakes water levels. It really just depends on the weather.



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